



Eastern Europe

Recent developments

The enlargement of the European Union in May 2004 highlighted the need to strengthen the national asylum system of the Western CIS countries (Belarus, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine). UNHCR has been encouraged by the enhanced cross-border dialogue between these States and the new EU Member States and candidate States, notably through the Söderköping process, which provides a forum for discussion of common concerns. A High-Level Review Meeting (HLRM) was held in Minsk, Belarus in May 2004, within the framework of the CIS Conference follow-up. It was agreed that the formal CIS Conference structures would be dissolved in 2005, but that the achievements of the CIS Conference would provide the foundations for a new framework of cooperation including working consultations on refugees and asylum, migration, statelessness and related issues.

The Northern Caucasus remains a cause for deep concern. UNHCR has promoted and indeed catalysed the exercise of the right of IDPs from conflict-ridden Chechnya to stay in neighbouring Ingushetia if unwilling to return to their place of

Armenia

Azerbaijan

Belarus

Georgia

Republic of Moldova

Russian Federation

Ukraine



permanent residence. Thanks to a constructive dialogue between all stakeholders, and despite the fears of renewed coercion preceding the closure of the last tented camp in Ingushetia in May 2004, in general IDPs were given a free choice: they could either relocate to temporary settlements offering acceptable levels of physical comfort, or return to Chechnya (with assurances that upon return more support would be delivered should security conditions permit). Overall, security has unfortunately continued to deteriorate in both Ingushetia and North Ossetia (Russian Federation), creating conditions which have compromised consistent progress. In this environment, UNHCR has continued to advance its dual-track approach and donors have shown a very supportive interest in progress.

In the Southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) the available economic indicators give rise to cautious optimism. Georgia offers little reassurance that its economy will be strong enough to lend adequate support to solutions for its displaced people. Overall, the Southern Caucasus is tormented by a knot of unresolved conflicts which will require political solutions before displacement issues can be resolved. The relationship between events in the Northern Caucasus and the situation of refugees and IDPs in the Southern Caucasus must be acknowledged. UNHCR stands ready in the region to facilitate returns when

conditions allow, and will also continue to advocate and support efforts by the Governments concerned to arrive at solutions for the displaced. Against this backdrop, UNHCR will continue to address the important question of the development of asylum systems. While varying degrees of asylum legislation exist in all three countries, in many cases there is a continuing need to address legislative gaps, and – equally important – standards of implementation.

Strategic objectives

Lined up along the eastern border of the enlarged European Union, Belarus, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova are subject to similar geo-political forces. The three countries also face common challenges with regard to the establishment of comprehensive migration policies, building asylum systems in line with international standards as well as finding durable solutions for refugees, including local integration. UNHCR remains committed to supporting the legal changes and institutional capacity building necessary to enhance refugee protection and prevent *refoulement*. It is also working towards the reduction (and ultimately the permanent elimination) of statelessness in the region.

In the Southern Caucasus, UNHCR's objective, in addition to advocating an overall solution for the displaced, is to help the Governments to further strengthen national asylum systems in accordance with relevant international standards and norms. The Office will continue building partnerships with national and international organizations and promote the inclusion of the remaining refugee and IDP groups into wider regional and national development and recovery programmes. While constrained to redirect limited resources away from the provision of direct humanitarian aid, UNHCR will remain committed to upholding an advocacy role for these destitute populations.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in the **Russian Federation** are described in a separate chapter. The following paragraphs cover operations in the rest of Eastern Europe.

In **Armenia**, UNHCR will continue to offer its expertise to the Government for the purposes of bringing its legal apparatus into line with international instruments related to the rights of persons of concern to UNHCR. With the increased geographical proximity of the enlarged European Union, Armenia is likely to find itself on a major migration route. As with all mixed migratory flows, the paramount task will be to ensure that genuine asylum-seekers are able to find international protection. While the Office will continue to provide material assistance to the most destitute segments of the refugee population generated by the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, it is clear that this limited assistance is not sustainable, unlike the comparatively far-sighted efforts to integrate refugees into wider economic and social development plans.

Azerbaijan has been confronted with one of the largest IDP populations in the world for more than a decade. This protracted situation has yet to be resolved and, as for the refugee population in Armenia, UNHCR is urging all relevant actors in the international community involved in wider national development programmes to continue to pay attention to these IDPs who number in the

thousands. The Office will continue to conduct care and maintenance projects for the benefit of a limited and vulnerable portion of the overall caseload of IDPs. UNHCR will concentrate chiefly on the capital city, Baku, but will also give renewed attention to the remainder of that IDP population in other regions of the country, in partnership with the Government and other actors involved in sustainable development (such as the UNDAF process).

UNHCR's work for mandate refugees and asylum-seekers is likely to increase. UNHCR will continue to support the Government in its efforts to establish a functioning RSD unit in accordance with international standards. The UNHCR office in Azerbaijan will still have to directly support a considerable number of destitute urban refugees, mostly Chechens, and lobby for the improvement of their humanitarian status.

In **Belarus**, to enhance the quality of asylum in the context of mixed migration flows, UNHCR will continue to assist the authorities to establish a humane system for managing irregular migration flows with a focus on ensuring that the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees are respected and that durable solutions are found for them. To advance this goal, capacity-building activities will target the authorities and NGOs dealing with migration and refugee issues. UNHCR will shift the emphasis away from care and maintenance towards activities relating to local integration, which is the most viable option for the majority of refugees in Belarus. Since refugees will be eligible to apply for Belarusian citizenship in 2004/2005, UNHCR will focus its advocacy efforts on the





Ukraine: On World Refugee Day, 20 June 2003, Hanifa Karimi, a young Afghan refugee, was invited to the State Committee along with 20 other refugees, to receive official travel documents issued by the Ukrainian Government. *UNHCR Kiev*

simplification of the acquisition of citizenship by recognized refugees. The Office will continue its advocacy for the accession of Belarus to the international statelessness instruments, in particular the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

In **Georgia**, the political situation evolved dramatically in 2004, with tense moments leading to fears of renewed internal displacement and consequent preparations to update contingency plans. At the time of writing, the situation in and around South Ossetia is still causing concern and UNHCR will closely monitor developments and participate, to the best of its ability, in any confidence or peace-building endeavours. A programme to facilitate voluntary returns both from North Ossetia and Georgia proper to South

Ossetia, jointly developed with the OSCE and UNDP, supported by the EC and endorsed by the Joint Control Commission, will be continued in 2005. In the same vein, the search for durable solutions for IDPs from Abkhazia will be supported by UNHCR, which has been an active participant in the conflict resolution process led by the SRSG directing UNOMIG. Both groups of IDPs will benefit from revalidation of their status, to be implemented by the Government of Georgia with the assistance of UNHCR. This revalidation exercise will allow for better targeting of the beneficiary population and more efficient and effective use of scarce resources in the long term.

Apart from this important caseload of IDPs in Georgia, UNHCR's core mandate requires follow-up on the programme developed in support of

thousands of Chechen refugees. The options of local integration and resettlement will continue to be sought for selected beneficiaries as described in programme plans for the 2005 Annual Budget. The return to Georgia of stateless Meshketians currently in the Russian Federation is far from imminent, but UNHCR will continue to promote discussions on this matter and more generally Georgia's accession to the Conventions on Statelessness.

In the **Republic of Moldova**, UNHCR's main goals for 2005 will remain: 1) to assist the Government to improve the national asylum system and 2) to support national NGOs to provide legal and integration assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR will continue to provide legal advice on further improvements to the existing asylum framework. Training activities will continue. UNHCR will provide assistance to the most destitute asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR will enhance its cooperation with UN agencies in the Republic of Moldova, the OSCE and other international actors. UNHCR will continue to participate in training events under the Söderköping Process.

In 2004, UNHCR's Office in **Ukraine** started to assume regional functions. In 2005, the Kyiv office will take on more responsibility for the development of a comprehensive and coordinated approach by Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova to the development of more robust and harmonized asylum systems. In addition, UNHCR plans to continue to consolidate the involvement of States and civil society counterparts in subregional processes. The Cross Border Cooperation (CBCP/Söderköping) Secretariat, based in Kyiv within UNHCR's premises, has proved to be instrumental in facilitating the sharing with

Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Belarus, of information and best practices on migration and asylum management in neighbouring countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania) and EU Member States further west.

In Ukraine, UNHCR will support capacity-building activities to enable key actors within the asylum system to ensure access to fair and efficient asylum procedures. UNHCR will continue to share its legal expertise on issues related to refugees. The Office will strive to redirect its assistance activities towards refugee self-reliance and support the Government in shaping a national plan for integration of refugees. A network of legal assistance NGOs will be supported and expanded to four additional regions, thus covering 19 regions with significant numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR will continue to call for Ukraine's accession to the international instruments governing statelessness.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Armenia	1,480,185
Azerbaijan	3,033,378
Belarus	1,000,215
Georgia	3,859,300
Republic of Moldova	593,385
Russian Federation	12,130,003
Ukraine	3,093,118
Regional activities ¹	57,500
Total	25,247,084

¹Includes scholarships for refugee students.